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Cubans in a Lost Cause

By Richard Harwood
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THE HEAT and the special brilliance of the sunlight matched the mood of the huge crowd of Cuban exiles in the Orange Bowl in Miami on December 29, 1962.

The cadenced roar from 40,000 throats was like a heavy surf beating in the great stadium:

"Guerra! (war) Guerra! Guerra!"

They were caught up in an emotional frenzy touched off by President John F. Kennedy who had, a moment earlier, received the only thing of value the survivors of the Bay of Pigs had to give — the flag of Brigade 2506.

Deeply moved, the President declared: "I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this brigade in a Free Havana!"

To the Cubans, that impulsive promise was a liberation pledge. It gave birth to extravagant hopes. Those hopes, the brigade's biographer Haynes Johnson has written, began to die when Mr. Kennedy died. The process was accelerated by the preoccupation with Vietnam. Today, they have all but vanished, like the brigade itself. The exile community is splintered, leaderless, disillusioned, and impotent.

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THE FEW activists who remain for the most part regard the Government of the United States in 1967 more as an adversary than a friend.

Felipe Rivero, who drank Scotch with a beer chaser on the beach at the Bay of Pigs, is in jail in Miami awaiting action on charges of plotting "violent acts against Cuba."

Orlando Bosch, head of the Insurrectional Movement for Revolutionary Recovery (IMRR), is under indictment in Miami and in Georgia for attempted piracy of ships in the Cuban trade, attempted gun-running, and conspiracy to blow up a Cuban sugar mill.

Jorge Mas, an intellectual bomb thrower who runs the largest of the extant exile organizations — RECE (Cuban Representation of Exiles) — broods in a windowless backroom on West Flagler street over the hostility of American officialdom.

"They give Castro a sanctuary," he complains bitterly. "But they harass us. They seize our boats and our guns. Their agents (from the Immigration and Naturalization Service) spy on us all the time."

Ramon Donestevez, a chubby boatbuilder who dreams of a "sail-in" to Havana to plead for the release of political prisoners, is threatened with a five-year prison sentence if he carries out his plan. Immigration Service agents follow him 24 hours a day to frustrate his scheme.

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THE MORE substantial figures associated with the Bay of Pigs — many of them military heroes — have dropped out of sight. At least two were committed to mental hospitals. Others have been discredited by time and events.

Manuel Ray, who was to have been the minister of sabotage and internal affairs if the Castro regime had fallen in 1961, lost face and influence in 1964 when he botched a new invasion scheme. Manuel Artime, civilian leader of the Bay of Pigs contingent, suffered a similar fate. He is now said to be in the restaurant business in Florida.

Eloy Guttierez Menoyo, a guerrilla warfare theoretician, was captured and jailed in Cuba when he attempted to translate his theories into practice against the Castro government.

Only Erneido Oliva, second in command of Brigade 2506, retains his old prestige. But he is no longer active in the exile organizations. He has his own dreams of military conquest and they do not involve the United States directly.

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AN AMERICAN diplomatic official, surveying the disarray, compares the Cubans now to the Polish exiles in London. "The Poles," he remarked "have three separate 'governments' in exile. That's the history of all exile movements. They break up into splinter groups like the Cubans, who have no effective leadership and no ability to work together."

Another officer of the Federal bureaucracy who is engaged in what is known as "intelligence work" is equally harsh and equally clinical in his judgments:

"The ability of the exiles to influence the course of affairs in Cuba is nil. Their input has absolutely no effect."

The "input" to which he referred consists of isolated and unproductive acts of terrorism, carried out with great infrequency and conspicuous clumsiness.

There is no visible evidence that the CIA is encouraging, financing or arming exiles. The terrorists groups such as Amando Fleites' second front, Orlando Bosch's insurrectional movement, Alpha 66 and Jorge's Mas's RECE live hand to mouth, operate on emotional impulses and are subject to continual harassment by American authorities.

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U. S. OFFICIALS estimate that the largest of the groups — RECE — has no more than 300 or 400 active members at the outside, although Mas has 15,000 applications for the "Liberation Army" locked up in his safe.

Oliva, who has no visible means of support but travels extensively in Latin America and turns aside questions about his connection with the U.S. Government, is confident that an army of 40,000 or 50,000 exiles could be raised with no great difficulty.

Cuba, he says, can be liberated only by Cubans and other Latins. He believes there is no place for American troops in such an undertaking, although American arms would be necessary.

Both Oliva and Jorge Mas of RECE believe that Castro is stirring up trouble throughout Latin America and is actively encouraging the Negro "revolt" in the United States.

As a result, they believe collective military action against Castro will one day become a necessity. Mas thinks that day may be close at hand.

"You have lost the war in Vietnam," he declares. "You have lost the War on Poverty. You have chaos and anarchy in your cities. The only place the U.S. can rebuild its prestige is in Cuba. We do not ask for U.S. troops. We only want a change in policy to help Cuban freedom."

SIGNIFICANT PROGNOSTICATION?
OR SHOULD WE ANTICIPATE THE [illegible] FOREIGN POLICY THRUST?